

*Our Lord close by you and within you, ready to put His hand to the work as soon as you call upon Him for help, and you will see that all will go well.*

*St. Vincent de Paul*

## **Motivation and Model: St. Vincent de Paul**

For the writer or researcher in 2016, a computer search on St. Vincent DePaul is somewhat counterintuitive. One would expect to first find a few biographies of the esteemed saint, followed by some of the many churches in his name



and perhaps a page or two of his many quotable sayings.

Instead, Google and its like first show pages of good works and ministries, all done in the name and example of Vincent de Paul. A search for illustrations of St. Vincent also returns pictures of the poor being fed and clothed, of young people conducting food drives and numerous good works done by St. Vincent de Paul societies worldwide.

When you do read St. Vincent's biography it is clear his life was one of contrasts. Though born to a humble and hardworking family, the young Vincent saw joining the priesthood mostly as ticket to a life of privilege, early retirement and sufficient funds.

Only when his plans for advancement lead to nothing did Vincent find the beginnings of his calling. As pastor of an undistinguished poor parish outside of Paris, he there discovered great happiness and purpose. Even then the contrasts continued. One of France's most influential and richest families asked for him to be their chaplain.

Surrounded by luxury unimaginable even today, he served the family while convincing them his work among the poor was necessary and holy. Remarkably, they came to agree; financing and encouraging Vincent's work among the impoverished.

Over the rest of Vincent's long life he founded organizations and orders which all served the poor and needy. His first, The Confraternity of Charity, mobilized the laity to help the less fortunate. Only later did the Congregation of Mission and Daughters of Charity (the orders we call Vincentian), come about. Throughout his life he reminded those who had been given much to help those with little.

Vincent's life, far from being the stepping stone to ease and comfort was instead a remarkable, widespread and focused effort to meet the needs of the poor and remind the church and its people of our obligations to the less privileged. As he said "We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor..."

*So, our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and do what? To set people's hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love.*

*St. Vincent de Paul*

## **St. Vincent De Paul Parish – Germantown**

### **Our History**

**M**uch like the life of our parish namesake, the history of St. Vincent de Paul Parish has had many contrasts, changes and challenges.

When Bishop Kenrick of Philadelphia helped lay the cornerstone for St. Vincent's on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1849, the ceremony was disrupted by an angry crowd of "nativists," who wanted no part of a Catholic expansion in Philadelphia's Germantown neighborhood. Stones were thrown and angry voices raised. Thankfully the incident caused no physical harm.

It took over 10 years to complete the entire church, but mass was first celebrated in the nave on July 13 of 1851 and the church complete on November 9, 1859.

The parish grew quickly and deliberately. Soon there was a school, then the Rectory. The Vincentians established a seminary and other churches in the area. Germantown itself was prosperous, home to many factories, plants and mills where many parishioners worked. Homes, both modest and grand, sprung up and

merchants from department stores to specialty shops flourished to serve the families who lived in them.

As St. Vincent's grew (there were 10,000 parishioners by the turn of the century) its varied outreach to its members and the community grew as well. The Parish Hall was erected in 1885 and it served as a true community center, home to many social and athletic events. There was even a bowling alley! The heart of the Vincentians mission continued as plays and social events raised money not just for the parish but for the poor as well. Parish publications and newsletters were read by thousands of people and catalogued the news of many clubs and ministries as well as continuing outreach to the poor.

As in all things, when change came it was hard to notice. The economy shifted after World War II. Slowly but inexorably, plants and mills closed, the victims of cheaper competition overseas or in other parts of the country. As the 50's ended many area stores had closed and what were once pristine Germantown neighborhoods began a slow decay. White flight ensued and the racial characteristics of the community changed dramatically.

Like so many parishes in similar city neighborhoods, St. Vincent's was, in the 60's, a small group of older Catholics holding on to their faith, mostly unaffected by the many changes of Vatican II. The neighborhood showed its age and the church did as well. The many programs and outreach efforts were at best diminished and all too often disappeared. Attempts to institute some Vatican II reforms in the early seventies were met with resistance and indifference.

It was not until 1977 that St. Vincent's fully embraced Vatican II and became in many ways, the parish it remains today. Pastor "Bud" Englert, much like Vincent de Paul began his renewal with an emphasis on the laity and their role in the parish and the church as a whole. He clearly spoke of the laity as key to Christ's mission on earth, with a vital vocation, and necessary to all the efforts of the Church.

## **St. Vincent De Paul Parish – Germantown**

### **Who Are We Today?**

**O**ur history serves as the beginnings of St. Vincent's today – a church made up of people who live their faith, focus on the poor with a charisma that draws people not just from Germantown but throughout the Delaware Valley.

From being the first Catholic Parish in Germantown, it is now the only Catholic Parish there. Founded originally in 1851 it was "re-founded" in 2012 as the merged parish of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Francis of Assisi and Immaculate Conception. The current 650 registered households of St. Vincent de Paul Parish are a blending of these three parishes. Hundreds more travel great distances to participate in Liturgy and in the other Ministry Partners: In Dwelling, Face to Face, My Place Germantown, DePaul Catholic School and Las Anonas Parish, our sister parish in El Salvador.

Today St. Vincent de Paul parish is still a place where vibrant liturgy, rooted in the Eucharist, joins the clergy and the people in a common effort to be Christ like to a troubled world and serve all its people, remembering Vincent de Paul's special emphasis on the poor. Twenty six ministries allow every parishioner to be involved in the work of this parish.

St Vincent de Paul Parish today is YOU! Your active participation in the life and ministry of this Parish is what gives us our strength to witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ to each other and to the wider Germantown community. Your worship, witness and service in Jesus' name enable us to praise God and serve our neighbor in need.

“A mural of the crucified and resurrected Christ looks down at us from behind the altar. The same Risen Christ is in our midst. Along with the rest of the Church, WE are his Body. The renewal that has blessed us and that we seek more deeply is found only in him. The goal is transformation: we ourselves becoming more like Jesus, our church more like his body, and society more like the Reign of God about which Jesus spoke so much.” (*From the book God's Love is Fire: A Parish Becomes a People, a history of St. Vincent de Paul Parish by parishioner Richard K. Taylor on the occasion of the Parish sesquicentennial 1851-2001*)

# **“RAISING THE ROOF”**

## **Project Priorities:**

Replace 165 Year Old Roof (needed for 40 years)

Replace/Upgrade Bathrooms

Provide Accessibility to Bathrooms

Replace Church Floor

Accessibility to Rectory

Renovate Sacristy

Air Condition the Church

## **COST**

**\$2.5 Million**

## **FUNDING SOURCES**

\$1.7 Million from Insurance Settlement & Bequest

\$200,000 Sale of Windows, Altar, etc. from St. Francis of Assisi

\$250,000 Vincentian Gift to St. Vincent de Paul Parish

\$500,000 Capital Campaign Pledges from Parishioners and Friends

Pursuing Grants

*God often delays the conclusion of a holy endeavor so that those involved in it might merit the grace by the length of the work, their patience and their prayers.*

*St. Vincent de Paul*

*...if we are faithful to God, we will lack nothing.*

*St. Vincent de Paul*

## †THE CALL OF OUR FAITH

The long, accomplished history of St. Vincent de Paul Parish came about because of the hard work, sacrifice and foresight of parish members. When opportunities, even those accompanied by challenges, have presented themselves, we have always done our best to respond, mindful of those who will come after us. This is a time when we must consider how to meet our challenges, provide responsible stewardship and seize opportunities. The success of our efforts lies with us.

Why now? St. Vincent's words above tell us it is because "That those involved in it might merit the grace."

God gives us all so much, most particularly the gift of life. He has given us our faith and our parish. In return we have been good stewards. We have given the Lord our time, talents and treasure. Our parish family has always been very caring, loving and generous. We are asking for your help and investment in our future.

Our capital campaign, themed "***Welcoming All to Raise the Roof***" will begin in September, 2016. With your generous participation, prayers and support, it will be successful. Success means raising money but more importantly, it is a time to come



together as one united church in Germantown to secure the future home for the Catholics of today and those who will follow.

Our Capital Campaign Committee includes many dedicated, enthusiastic, capable leaders and is growing daily. However, this committee cannot meet the challenge alone. Many more hands working together will be needed to ensure its success. Together we will “Raise the Roof”, and transform our church to be more welcoming and accessible to all our members – young and old. We know, like our predecessors, today’s parishioners will respond positively to these efforts.

As we launch this campaign, we will reach out to you for your participation and financial support. Gifts of every size are necessary and appreciated. But more importantly, this campaign seeks to involve as many members as possible in order to build an even greater community of faith and friendship.

Prayerfully consider the many and varied resources God has placed in your hands. Consider how your gift to the Capital Campaign is a response to God’s continuing generosity to you. We must join together in making a sacrificial pledge to the Capital Campaign, over and above your regular offerings. Thank you for your faithfulness.

Many will choose pledges over several years (a three year pledge is suggested). Some will wish to memorialize members of their family. There will be opportunity for every parish member to participate in many different ways.

Most important, this campaign will enlist a broad spectrum of parishioners to take the next steps in our parish's long and proud history. Please prayerfully consider the many and varied resources God has placed in your hands. Consider how your gift to the Capital Campaign is a response to God's continuing generosity to you. And then, join your pastor, the Vincentians, and other members in making a sacrificial pledge to this Capital Campaign, over and above your regular offerings.

*"Whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully." 2 Corinthians 9:6-14*